

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from Kids Eat Right

How to Talk to Your Child about Weight

Most children and teens who are overweight are well aware of this fact. As a parent, you can talk about weight without causing guilt or placing blame. The following tips will help you and your family support your child and promote healthy eating and activity.

“What do I say?”

- **Use the word “healthy”^{1,2}**
 - When talking about weight with your child, take the focus off weight and appearance.
 - Talk about becoming healthier. Give examples, like running faster, jumping higher, and focusing better in school.
 - Be positive. Encourage the behaviors you want your child to do. For example, say, “Go play outside with Joey,” instead of, “Stop sitting on the couch watching TV.”
- **Ask how your child is feeling³**
 - Encourage your child to share feelings.
 - Let your child know that whatever he or she is feeling is okay.
 - Be there to listen.
- **Ask open-ended questions⁴**
 - Ask your child questions that begin with what, where, and how.
 - “What did you eat at school today?”
 - “Where would you like to walk tonight?”
 - “How do you feel today?”



Non-Food Rewards

For Younger Children

No-Cost:

- Sit at the head of the family dinner table
- Trip to the park
- Decide which game to play as a family
- Extra story time with you

Low-Cost:

- Sidewalk chalk
- Bubbles
- Jump rope
- Water toy

For Big Successes:

- Sport ball
- Scooter
- Enrollment in a new recreational activity

For Older Children

No-Cost:

- Call a friend
- Plan and prepare a healthy family meal
- Host a sleepover
- Choose your own chores

Low-Cost:

- Frisbee
- Inexpensive sports watch
- Headband
- Colorful shoelaces

For Big Successes:

- Tennis shoes
- Flattering clothes
- Skateboard
- Gym membership or enrollment in a new recreational activity
- Trip to the water park or paint ball

- **Keep food positive¹**

- Forbidding certain foods is not the answer.
- Forcing certain foods is not the answer, either.
- Only keep foods in the house you want your child to eat. (That means if you do not want your child to eat chips at home, you do not buy chips and no one in the house eats chips.)
- Allow your child to make healthy choices without forcing foods they do not enjoy.

- **Provide praise^{1,5}**

- Praise your child for making healthy decisions.
- Praise your child for accomplishments that have nothing to do with weight.
- Reward your child's positive behaviors with non-food rewards.

"How can our family help?"

- **Do not allow negative body talk^{1,5}**

- Do not allow negative body talk, by your child or any family member.

- **Use the word "we"¹**

- Being healthy involves the whole family. Use the word "we" so that your child knows that the whole family is involved. Everyone needs to eat healthy and be active every day.

- **Enjoy family meals³**

- Serve the same foods to the entire family, with input from everyone.
- Make family mealtime enjoyable. Talk about positive things. Do not scrutinize your child's eating habits or compare children in your family.

- **Be a good role model^{3,5}**

- Show your child how to be healthy by practicing your own healthy behaviors.

- **Love your child⁵**

- Reassure your child that you love him or her for their internal qualities, like a fun and caring personality, goofy jokes, or creativity.

Resources:

1. Dolgoff J. *Red Light, Green Light, Eat Right*. 1st Edition. New York: Rodale, 2010. 3-7.
2. Shield J, Mullen MC. *Healthy Eating, Healthy Weight for Kids and Teens*. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2012.
3. Kosharek SM. *If Your Child is Overweight: A Guide for Parents*. Chicago: American Dietetic Association, 2006.
4. Shield, J, Mullen MC. *Counseling Overweight and Obese Children and Teens*. 1st. American Dietetic Association, 2008.
5. *Parents: Talking to Your Kids about Weight*. The Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity Web site. <http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/bias/parents/Parents-HowtoTalktoYourChildaboutWeight.pdf>. Accessed December 11, 2012.

Additional Resources:

Weigh In. Stop Obesity Alliance Web site. www.stopobesityalliance.org. Accessed December 11, 2012.



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